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AUTHOR Twigg, Helen Parramore
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ABSTRACT

The extensive use of adjunct and temporary faculty to teach basic general education courses at community colleges can be professionally harmful to both tenured and adjunct faculty. Part-time faculty are guaranteed no health insurance, raises, promotions, nor voice in the decisions that affect them. Their plight affects all faculty in many ways, including the following: (1) regular faculty have ethical obligations to help train adjuncts and to familiarize them with the curriculum, materials, and procedures of the department, thereby adding extra work to an already heavy workload with no additional pay; (2) permanent faculty are usually held responsible for the quality of education in their departments, but they have no voice in the number of classes taught by adjuncts or in their selection; (3) when adjuncts fail in their responsibilities, whether by quitting mid-semester or by doing a poor job, this failure must be absorbed by regular faculty, who must take over their course or help students "catch up" in subsequent classes; (4) there is gross injustice and outrageous hypocrisy in the pretense of professional equality when adjuncts are paid one-third of the salary of full-time professors; and (5) the widespread use of adjunct and temporary faculty severely curtails opportunities for tenured faculty, as positions vacated by natural attrition are often filled by less costly adjuncts. Thus, the present use of adjunct and temporary faculty serves only to exploit a very rare and valuable natural resource--the highly educated person who wants to teach. (JMC)

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USES AND ABUSES OF ADJUNCT FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Helen Parramore Twigg

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Paper presented at the national conference of the Community College Humanities Association, Washington, DC, November 9-11, 1989.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

November, 1989, Washington, D.C.

by

Helen Parramore Twigg, Professor of Humanities

Valencia Community College

P.O. Box 3028 Orlando, Florida 32802

USES AND ABUSES OF ADJUNCT FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I want to speak about the ways that extensive use of adjunct faculty hurt us all professionally. Too often the full time and tenured faculty of an institution are unconcerned about the problems of adjunct and temporary faculty, perhaps because they feel too secure, or perhaps because they have been led to believe that nothing can be done about it, or even more important, that it does not affect them.

I'd like to do a little role playing with you for a few minutes. My magic wand makes all of you out there graduating students, most with doctorates, some with masters plus thirty hours or more. You are all bright, eager, talented specialists, and you have spent many years and much money learning the skills and meeting the requirements of your profession. Let's say you are entering the field of medical research, or computer sciences, aerospace engineering, or perhaps chemistry. And I am here delivering your commencement address.

"As you go forth to work, I want you to know that I am proud of all of you. I know what sacrifice and effort you and your families have made in order for you to get to this point in your life. I know you will all find work because the world needs your talents desperately. However, I must warn you that only one third of you--perhaps at the most one half of you-- will have work which will pay you enough to live on. You lucky ones will be able to get health insurance, raises, promotions, and contribute to a retire - ment fund or buy into some annuity programs. Given the good work I know you will do, you will have job security and be able to build toward the future.

The rest of you, however, will have to be content to work for less than a third what the others will get. You will have no health insurance, no raises, no promotions, no voice in the decisions that affect you, no guarantee that you will even have a job in six months, and if you complain about your condition--which reflects a very unprofessional attitude, not to mention a lack of gratitude--you will have no jobs at all. However, given a good attitude and profes- sional performance, you will be allowed to do the same work as the others. The work is out there waiting and the world needs you and your skills. It's just that there isn't enough to pay you. Surely you can see that. Where is the money going to come from??? And really, things might be worse than they are. Some places have only 20% of their professionals on full time work, which means that 80% are

part timers. So look at the donut instead of the hole. After all, given a little luck, maybe as many as half of you will be paid fairly."

Can you think of another situation where the lack of operating funds in an essential industry is made up by disenfranchising and impoverishing half or more of the absolutely essential skilled workers? Can you think of another profession that would tolerate it?

I'd like to make clear that there are legitimate adjunct positions which benefit all concerned, such as classes which are held at out of the way places at odd hours, infrequently offered classes which require high-tech specialists, such as the laser optics course at Valencia, or possibly a specialized medical course which is offered to our nursing students once a year. And a community college should tap the special knowledge and talent within the community itself. What better education than to be taught creative writing by a published novelist? No one argues against the use of <u>all</u> adjunct faculty. There are, however, many things wrong with the current practice which sees half or more of the basic general education courses offered every semester, by every college in the nation, being taught by adjuncts--the "homeless" of the academic world.

Their plight adversely affects us all in many ways, but I want to focus on just five today. (I had a professor once who insisted that humans could only hold seven things in their minds at once, so a teacher should never expect a student to cope with

more. I don't want to overtax you all today, so I'll just mention five.)

First, regular faculty have ethical obligations to help train adjuncts and familiarize them with curriculum, materials and procedures of the department. This means added work for no additional pay for people who already have heavy loads. Most of us teach five and six classes a semester in addition to other things. We don't need more demands on our time. Adjuncts frequently lack experience in teaching the courses they are hired to teach, so if regular faculty are committed to quality and excellence, they will try to assist adjuncts. But those adjuncts we worked hard to train this semester may or may not be here next semester. There is nothing in adjunct teaching to hold faculty, or to inspire loyalty or commitment. It is only the hope of full time work that keeps adjuncts "loyal," and that is perhaps the cruelest hoax of all. I know of many other situations similar to Mr. Sarafian's, where colleges have found teachers perfectly competent for years, and then hired someone else when a position opened. There is usually nothing in being a good adjunct that gives the slightest edge in getting hired.

Second, permanent faculty are concerned with, often charged with, and held responsible for, the quality of education in their departments, but they have no voice in the number of classes taught by adjuncts or in the selection of the adjuncts who teach the same courses they do. Yet the graduates of these departments become the measure of the quality of the permanent faculty and of the school. Our professional reputation in the community and in

other schools which accept our students may rest entirely on whether or not we "luck out" with our adjunct faculty. Any efforts to work toward quality education within a department or college is destroyed when half the classes (and sometimes more than that) are taught by adjuncts who have no voice, no commitment, and no continuity in the department or the school.

Third, when adjuncts fail in their responsibilities--quit mid-semester or do a bad job-- the failure must be absorbed by regular faculty in some way, perhaps by taking on extra classes or trying to "catch students up" in subsequent courses. For already "stretched" faculty, this creates severe problems. Some colleges make a practice of scheduling many sections and filling them with students before they have teachers to teach them. Then department chairs scurry around frantically at the last minute for adjunct faculty, and sometimes only "luke warm bodies" can be found to fill the voids. Numbers games like this may make administration glow when looking at FTE, but actually this is a game where all lose--faculty, administration, students, the community the school serves--<u>all lose</u>. Concern for quality cannot be a consideration under these circumstances. (You know, the only thing that surprises me when studies reveal how little our students know, is that anyone is surprised by the result.)

Fourth, there is a moral concern which involves us all. If we sit passively by, we are in essence condoning the practice. In reality, there is gross injustice and outrageous hypocrisy in the pretense of professional equality existing between adjuncts and full time staff when adjuncts are paid one third what full

time professors are paid. Pay clearly states worth. I can think of nothing more demoralizing and demeaning to a sincere professional than allowing themselves to be exploited by a system which seems unconcerned about their plight.

Fifth, the widespread use of adjunct and temporary faculty has severely curtailed opportunities for tenured faculty. Positions vacated by natural attrition have often been filled by adjuncts, because it's cheaper. Full time positions have been scarce since 1970 when budget crunches issued in the concept of adjunct faculty as an emergency measure. But since then, positions become more scarce all the time. If institutions began hiring full time faculty to meet the continuing demand of their student load, jobs would open up everywhere. There would not be a school or college nationwide that would not have to advertise immediately for professors, and what a breath of fresh air that would bring! Opportunities would abound, and a vitality that has been lacking in our profession for twenty years would spring up overnight. Healthy competition would banish the uneasy paranoia that has characterized higher education for 20 years. We would benefit, students would benefit, and the institutions would benefit.

To avoid charges of discrimination and unfair practices, some institutions limit the number of courses an adjunct can teach. This, however, does not help the situation, rather it increases the stress on the adjunct to make a living, increases the stress of department chairmen trying to cover classes, and increases the likelihood of hiring unqualified adjuncts because of "emergency" conditions. The only real purpose such restric-

tion serves is to protect the institution from law suits, which could easily result from having two equally qualified professors teaching the same courses side by side, one being paid a fraction of what the other gets. Why hasn't there been a rash of class action law suits? The hostility that I encounter from administration when I speak of these things, indicates to me more than anything else that they do recognize that they are participating in unfair practices. They are indeed defensive and uneasy. When pressed, the response from administrators usually is: everybody's doing it; it's going to get worse before it's better; statistics show that by 2000 more than half the classes nationwide will be taught by adjuncts, so don't fight it. They speak as if this were Darwinian evolution in process, but it is only a trend and a rather recent one at that. When a wealthy nation like ours is shocked by the tragic ignorance and lack of skills in our youth, is shamed internationally by the performance of our students on every level, is crying out for talented teachers while confronting educational wastelands in every quarter, then the more ironic, cruel and even foolish, the exploitation of college faculty seems. Trend is not destiny, unless we choose to let it be.

The present use of adjuncts is a monstrous exploitation of a very rare and valuable national resource--the highly intelligent, highly educated person who <u>wants to teach.</u> How can we sit passively by while legislators and administrators "solve" their financial problems by not paying teachers? The logic boggles the mind--we can't afford education, we have to have education, so we'll let the teachers pay for it. I can't imagine how we have let

it come about in the first place, but since it is here and fighting hard to become tradition, we must do everything we can to reverse the trend.

What can we do? There are several points that I would urge you to think about and act on however you can. First, no adjunct who is not fully qualified should be hired to teach credit courses. Second, every fully qualified adjunct should be paid as much per course as a full time counterpart would be. Third, classes should not be offered to students unless qualified adjuncts have already been procured. Fourth, wherever departments hire many adjuncts to teach their regularly offered classes, they should be pressured to open up full time positions.

Every professor and every professional association in the nation should focus on this issue and begin to fight against the exploitation of adjuncts and fight for more full time jobs until our cause is heard. If we don't, our ancient and honorable profession is doomed to piece work. What will happen to this nation if we continue to depend on an exploited and resentful minority to inspire our next generation?

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